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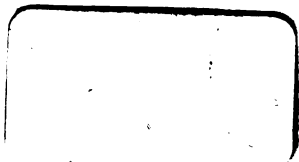
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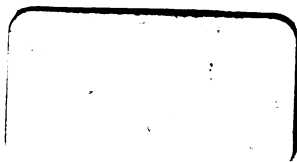
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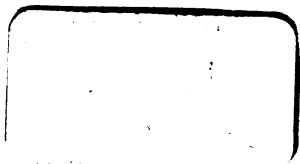
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A FALSE SAINT



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A FALSE SAINT

(L'Envers d'une sainte)

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY
FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

TRANSLATED BY
BARRETT H. CLARK



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
PROFESSOR ARCHIBALD HENDERSON

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1916

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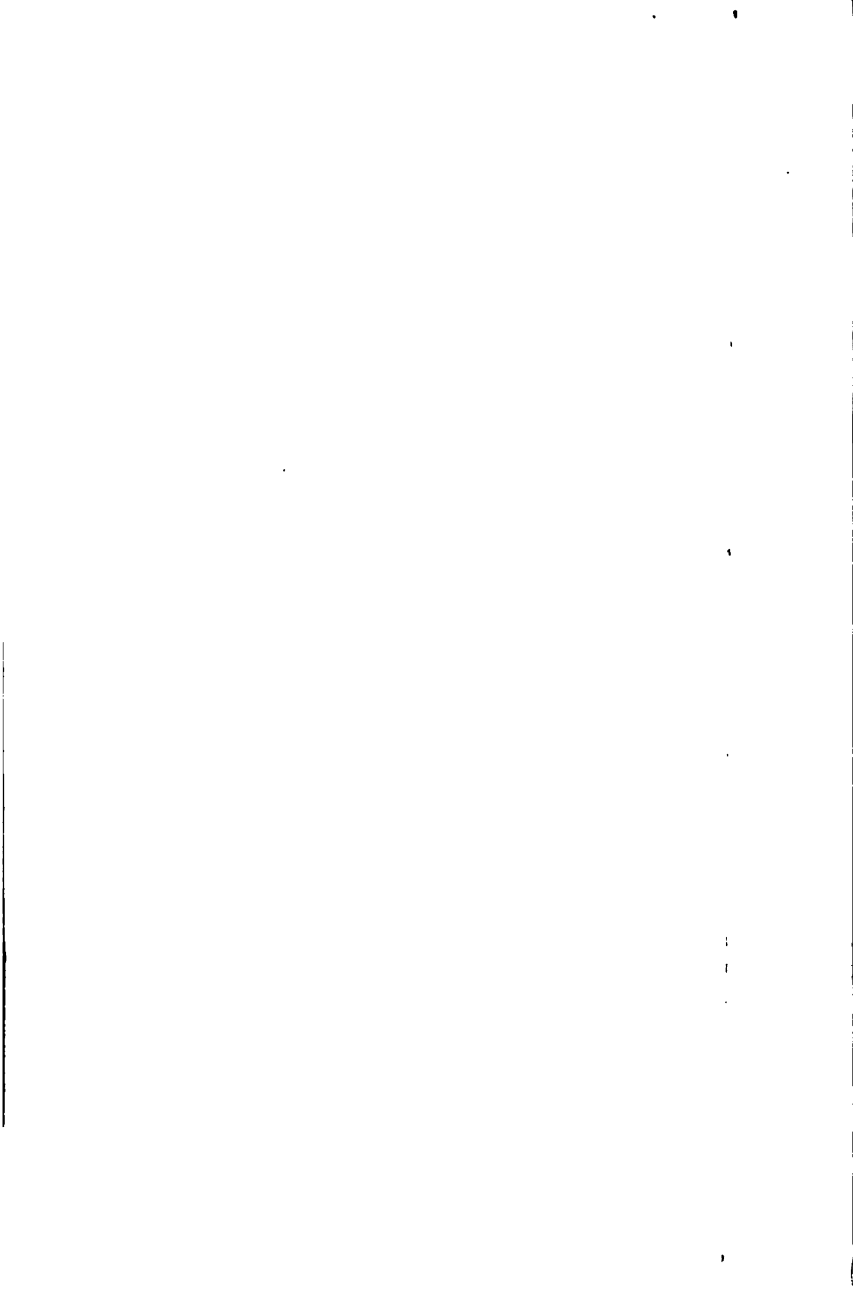
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To
FENIMORE MERRILL

**THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED WITH THE
KINDEST REGARDS OF THE TRANSLATOR**



PERSONS REPRESENTED

MADAME RENAUDIN

NOÉMIE, her sister

JULIE, her daughter

JEANNE

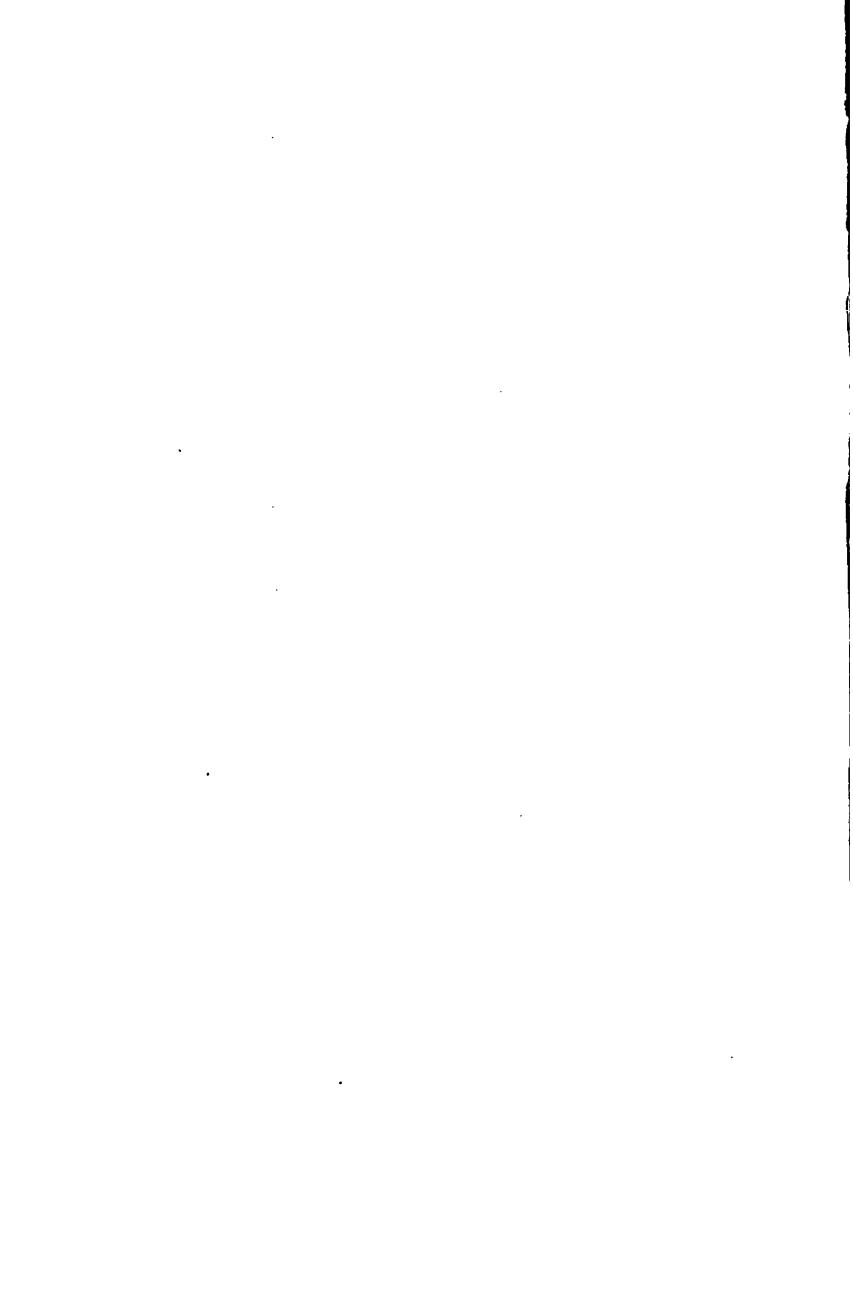
CHRISTINE, her daughter

GEORGES PIÉRRARD

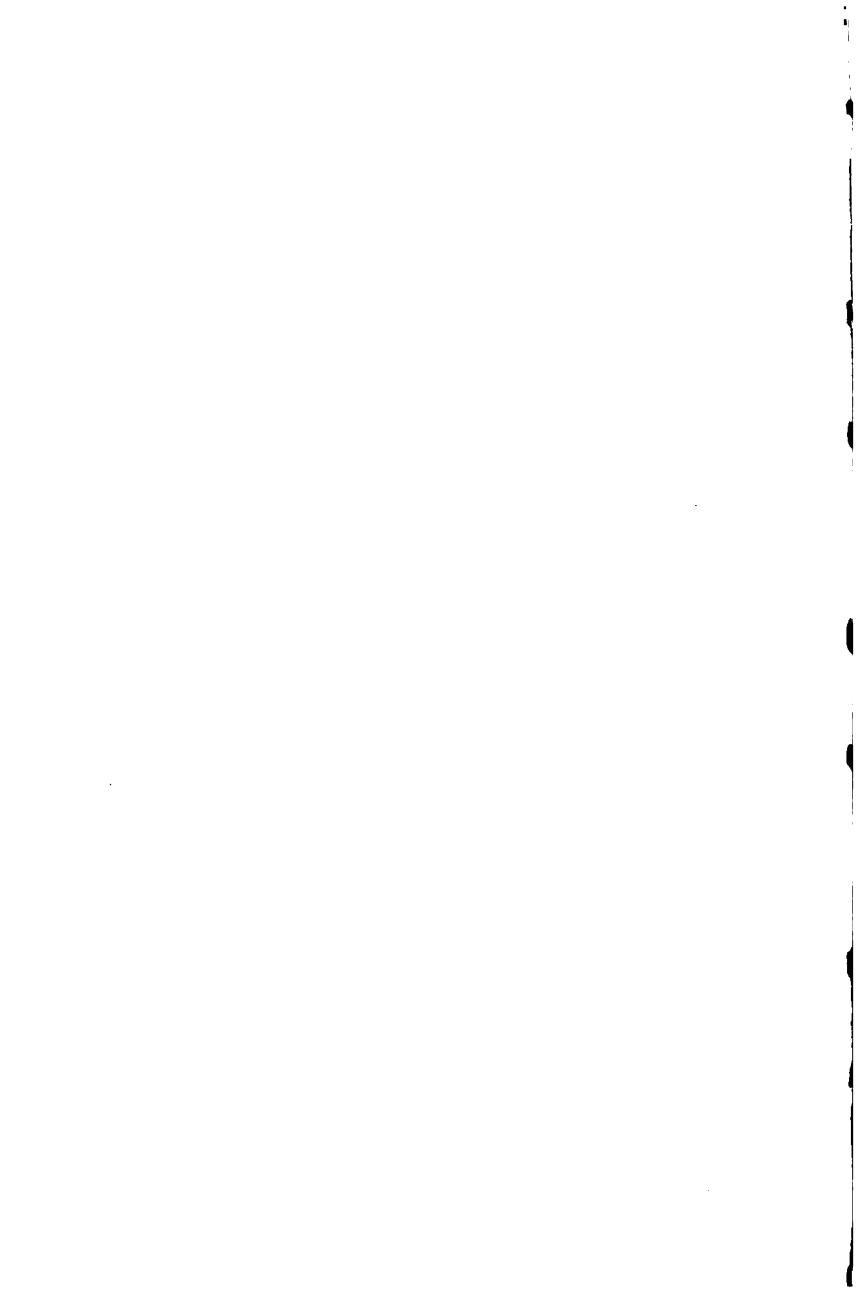
Scene: The country home of Madame Renaudin in France.

Time: The present.

“L'Envers d'une sainte” was first performed at the
Théâtre Libre in 1892.



Act 1.



ACT I

The drawing-room in a simple, middle-class home in a small town; waxed floors, thick, starched curtains, and ordinary conventional furniture. Everything is in its place, scrupulously well-ordered: lace covers on the backs of the chairs and sofas; round and lozenge-shaped rugs of many colors on the floor in front of each chair. Family portraits—rococo style—with philistine faces; a liqueur cabinet, backgammon board, a photograph album. No books nor magazines. The subject represented on the large clock is: "Muse Tuning Her Lyre."

As the curtain rises, the WIDOW RENAUDIN and NOÉMIE are present. MADAME RENAUDIN is dressed in a black silk dress, with flounces; it is out of date and severe, yet not without a certain pretension to elegance. The hat she wears is trimmed with violet ribbons and jet ornaments. She is evidently about to leave the house. NOÉMIE is dressed in simple gray linen. An apron is pinned to her waist.

NOÉMIE. She must be here any moment!

MADAME RENAUDIN. Will she have the presence of mind to stop the coach before the house? Her life at the convent must have made her a little stupid and forgetful. It would have been better to have told her we should meet her at the office; then there would be no chance of her making a mistake.

NOÉMIE. I can't imagine Julie stupid or absent-minded! She would have had to change a great deal! She used to be so impetuous!

MADAME RENAUDIN. But to be a nun for eighteen years!

NOÉMIE. Nearly nineteen—that does count for something! But then it only goes to prove that she has kept her independence of character: to break with so long a past! Think of it!

MADAME RENAUDIN. That is, if no one has influenced her! I shall be glad to see my daughter—When she decided to enter *Sacré Coeur*, I did all I could to dissuade her, because I never for an instant believed in her vocation; yet in spite of that, I was not at all happy when she wrote that she could not stand it any longer, she needed a change, and wanted to end her days with her family; that for her own salvation she must leave the convent where she was

no longer able to pray. She will be in a very difficult position! When people say she has given up, failed, the Pharisees will cross themselves. Yet she has been released from her vows—not without a good deal of trouble with Rome, though!

NOÉMIE. She is very pious; we'll give her plenty to do, taking care of the poor, and then our charity organizations— She was mistaken in her vocation—it is her misfortune, and every one will pity her. She struggled so long, too! We'll try to make her life worth living.

MADAME RENAUDIN. But it may seem more bitter than the one she has just left! The coach is late! I can't wait for it, I haven't time. Barbe is watching at the door, isn't she?

NOÉMIE. Yes. The moment she hears the horses' bells she'll run out to the steps and stop the coach, in case Julie hasn't told the driver. Poor Julie, it's a great comfort to know we'll see her soon, after so many years—and so many sad events—

MADAME RENAUDIN [*sadly*]. Yes—sad! But if she doesn't come soon, I'll have to go. I simply can't—

NOÉMIE [*listening*]. There she is! I hear the coach!

MADAME RENAUDIN [*after listening*]. You have a sharp ear: I don't hear anything!

NOÉMIE. Yes—— [*She runs and opens the window.*] Now, unless you're deaf—there, look there! There's a soldier on top—— Oh! By the left window, I thought——! It's she! She's waving her handkerchief. I knew she wouldn't be stupid. [*Both women lean out the window, and wave their handkerchiefs. The sound of the approaching coach increases.*] Let's run to meet her. [*They go out, leaving the door open. Exclamations, kisses, and the confusion incident to some one's arriving are heard outside, then the sound of a trunk falling in the vestibule. MADAME RENAUDIN and NOÉMIE come in with JULIE between them. JULIE wears a very simple, unfashionable black dress, a chestnut-colored straw hat, with a white scarf on the front, and a brown veil falling over one shoulder.*]

MADAME RENAUDIN [*kissing JULIE*]. My child! After eighteen years——

JULIE. It's like a dream! It seems I left all this yesterday! [*She kisses her mother and aunt.*] But you two, you're unkind, not coming to see me——

MADAME RENAUDIN. How could we? Your poor father's health——

JULIE [*pointing to a door*]. He died in that room, didn't he?

MADAME RENAUDIN. Yes. [*She wipes her eyes.*]

NOÉMIE. He spoke of you up to the very last.

JULIE. Was he conscious to the end?

MADAME RENAUDIN. Every moment. And so resigned to the will of the good Lord!

JULIE. Poor papa! [*She goes toward the door.*]
I'd like to say a little prayer by his bed. [*She goes into the room. There is a pause. Her mother and aunt remain by the door, looking at JULIE and wiping their eyes. JULIE says from the room:*] Everything is just as it used to be.

NOÉMIE. We've changed nothing.

JULIE [*reappearing*]. Poor papa, I can see him still! [*Turning toward the open door.*] There in his armchair, always so patient—ah, the dead!

MADAME RENAUDIN. To think of them—those we'll never see: your two grandmothers—Aunt Mélanie, Aunt Louise, and, three months ago, Cousin Henri!

JULIE [*controlling her emotions*]. I mourned for them there—Henri, so young, so necessary to his family!

MADAME RENAUDIN. Yes. When you have

lived a little and then think of the past, how happy and full it all seemed, and now how bleak! Don't you feel that?

JULIE. No—for me the life of the past is summed up in a few memories—hardly anything—a tiny nothing that grips the heart! [*She goes to the window, probably to feel at her ease, and looks outside.*] The garden hasn't changed. Oh, yes, those lilacs, planted at the other end! There used to be a yoke-elm hedge there.

NOÉMIE. It had to be taken out after that severe winter.

JULIE. Just as in our garden at *Sacré Coeur*: we lost a whole row of chestnuts. Chickens still in the same place, and the dog-house! No dog! What's become of Phanor?

MADAME RENAUDIN. The idea! He was old when you left.

JULIE. That's so; I am out of date!

MADAME RENAUDIN. Julie, I must go now. To-day is the general meeting of the "Enfants de Marie." Monseigneur has come here especially to be present; I'm chairman, and I must be there. I'll see you later. [*She kisses JULIE.*] It is too bad I have to go, though.

JULIE. What an important person you are!
Dear me!

MADAME RENAUDIN. You'll come to the next meeting; we expect you to be one of our most enthusiastic helpers.

JULIE. Yes, mamma.

[MADAME RENAUDIN *goes out.*

NOÉMIE [*as JULIE takes off her hat*]. Won't you have something to eat?

JULIE. No, thanks, Aunt. I had lunch in the station at Dijon two hours ago. For a woman who has been closed up half her life, I've stood the trip very well. Besides, I was so amused.

NOÉMIE. Your mother was sure you would get lost on the way.

JULIE. I? No danger of that!

NOÉMIE [*taking JULIE's hands*]. Now come and sit by me; we haven't talked for centuries. The thought that your mother superior read all my letters kept me from saying anything—you understand? And you—it was probably the same with you? [*They sit down. After looking at JULIE for a moment.*] Julie, I never thought I should see you here.

JULIE. He is dead now—I could come back.

NOÉMIE. But it was not only to avoid seeing Henri that you went to the convent; you were expiating——

JULIE. Hasn't the expiation lasted long enough? As a matter of fact, I didn't kill her. God did not wish me to die—because I should have done that if I had succeeded. I simply couldn't stand my life there. I was cold, almost hateful to my sisters—but I loved my pupils, I loved them so much! At the moment I began to be deeply attached to them their families took them away from me. The other sisters, nearly every one, were firmly convinced of their vocation; of course, they loved the girls, but they wanted to make saints of them—I didn't—they called me "Mother," and I was really their mother: and I was always in mourning for one of my daughters. You see, Aunt, I have never given up my vocation as a woman—sad and very human—I was among angels who did not understand me.

NOÉMIE. At least you had an intelligent confessor? Did you come back here on his advice?

JULIE. Oh, yes—an old man—excellent—he saw how I was suffering—it was plain enough. He thought it was better for me to return to the world and do as much good as possible there than to

waste away in a dungeon—my cell, that is. Intelligent? I hardly think so—he didn't understand how to deal with my case—he always turned to the past, and exhorted me to repent, spend my life in penitence. God in Heaven, what was I doing? Yes, I was a criminal, but I should not have had it forced down my throat that the convent was the galleys—

NOÉMIE. How about the mother superior? Did she know?

JULIE. The mother superior? I had three so well moulded that they were practically the same. Use the singular: the mother superior! It was my duty to tell her everything. She knew—yes.

NOÉMIE. You had no help there, then? Not even a little sympathy?

JULIE. They were good—all three—good and indulgent—sympathetic? No, not in the least. "Heaven"! They were continually harping on Heaven! I should be rewarded in Heaven: rewarded, consoled, recompensed, happy in Heaven! Oh, Aunt, what I have suffered on earth!

NOÉMIE [*kissing* JULIE]. Poor child.

JULIE [*brusquely, with lowered eyes, after a long pause*]. Tell me about Henri. I heard he was

dead, only that, not a single detail. I received the news in a nice letter from his daughter, Christine. An affectionate little note; it surprised me: to a relative she had never seen. But it didn't say anything. Then you—you wrote only two lines: simply the news. That wasn't kind, Aunt—I had expected something—

NOÉMIE. I didn't dare—I didn't know you felt—your heart—I was uncertain—

JULIE. My heart—it blamed you for your silence.

NOÉMIE. Then you still loved your cousin?

JULIE. I tell you I performed my religious duties in the best of faith. I never gave Henri a thought except when I prayed, but then I never prayed without thinking of Henri. You should have felt that, Aunt, you who have suffered; I am sure you know what despair there can be in the human heart—you have been my best friend in trouble—you should have understood me thoroughly. Was Henri sick for long?

NOÉMIE. A few days. Inflammation of the lungs. He was in perfect health until shortly before.

JULIE. And his last hours?

NOÉMIE. He was very brave, but, you know, he was one of the new generation—not like your father.

JULIE. Yet he received the final sacraments?

NOÉMIE. Oh, yes, he died peacefully—his wife and daughter were with him to the end.

JULIE [*hesitating*]. His wife—— After I left, did Jeanne tell——

NOÉMIE. Never! She doesn't deserve that suspicion. You had her promise not to say anything: she has kept it.

JULIE. It was wrong of me—yes, she has been very generous—almost too generous. If she had blained me for my crime instead of agreeing to call it an accident I should no doubt have gone through terrible agony, but the struggle would have thrust me into another field, as it were, and I should not be now merely a bit of the dry refuse of life——

NOÉMIE. Now, now, you don't believe a word of that. Dry refuse! You who have educated and brought up in the ways of God a whole generation of young girls, think of the good you can still do!

JULIE. Oh, the good! The good done by a soul in agony! [*After a pause.*] Aunt, Henri cannot have died without sending me some little message—a word? Since he was never told that I attempted to kill his wife, he must have regretted my having given up liberty, and all I suffered because

I had lost him. My vocation, ha! He knew what it was worth! He said nothing, then—just before he died?

NOÉMIE. In the last agony he mentioned some names: your mother's, mine, his sister's—yours, probably; nothing in particular— [She cries.] My poor child, *that* was all eighteen years ago—so long ago—

JULIE. Long? But he lived in the meantime, and to think he could forget, while I was shut up with that picture always before my eyes—always. I remember—

NOÉMIE. Don't imagine that your cousin forgot. It's true, he didn't speak of you to me during his illness—you see, we were so seldom alone together.

JULIE. But before—

NOÉMIE. Oh, often. He knew how intimate we were, and he thought we corresponded regularly—he asked me to let him see your letters.

JULIE. Did you show him very many?

NOÉMIE. Some—I read him some.

JULIE. Tell me how many—I'd like to know.

NOÉMIE [*hesitating*]. Two, I think.

JULIE. Two? So he asked twice for news of me?

NOÉMIE. Well, I wasn't very willing to tell him, you know. What would have been the good? But one day he talked to me a long time about you—about the peaceful state of mind you must have been enjoying. I didn't think it wise to let you know about that.

JULIE. But recently——

NOÉMIE. That was the day of his daughter's First Communion. After lunch we had coffee under the big pine. I happened to be alone with Henri. He didn't behave very politely toward me, but in spite of that I never knew a nicer boy—so good, so loyal!

JULIE [*anxiously*]. Yes, yes, good and loyal.

NOÉMIE. He showed me his little girl, pretty as a picture, dressed in a cloud of white, and he called her jokingly his little bride; then all at once he became serious: "My little bride, all in white, makes me think of another—far away—all in black. When I think of her, good-bye joy and happiness! Cousin Noémie, I have committed only one bad action in all my life—I feel the weight of it."

JULIE [*in exaltation*]. That's he! I have found him once more! He couldn't have forgotten me! We were too much to one another. Sooner or later

he must have come to me. Why wasn't I warned in time?

NOÉMIE [*horrified*]. Seeing the way you behave now, I know it would have been a great mistake. You had certain sacred obligations to fulfil, both of you.

JULIE. I feel deeply touched—what he said of me—I'm just a little dizzy—yes, I did have obligations to fulfil—and how did your conversation end? What else did Henri say?

NOÉMIE. He then told your story, the story we have wept over so often, you and I, my poor child! And he said he loved you deeply, and that you returned his love. Then he spoke of your oaths and vows, the plans you made and how they came out, then his year in Paris—

JULIE. And his home-coming—married—an elegant little Parisian woman, and I—out of my mind—

NOÉMIE. He knew what to expect: your going into a convent nearly broke his heart—he told me, that day, and the way he told me—

JULIE. Did you try to deceive him about—

NOÉMIE. No, as I believe in a life to come, I think that every one ought to realize his responsibilities, even if they cause the loss of one's peace of mind.

JULIE. All one's peace of mind. The process has agreed with me.

NOÉMIE. For a long while Henri blamed himself severely, and then he asked me to intercede, to explain to you, tell of his remorse, and ask your forgiveness, but I refused out and out, and told him that his regret would only lie heavy on your conscience as a nun; that you would not listen to me. As to your forgiving him, I took it upon myself to tell him that before you left you asked me to say that he was quite forgiven.

JULIE [*bitterly*]. Of course—he took from me only my happiness, I tried to take from him his own—and his wife's. Two for one; the proportion was no more than that!

NOÉMIE [*trying to calm her*]. Julie!

JULIE [*passionately*]. Well, then, in a fit of mad jealousy I *did* try to kill Jeanne. She was expecting a child—we were crossing a ravine on a narrow board which was used as a bridge—I was walking behind her—a slip—I pushed her—she fell—— A woman who does that is not forgiven. Ha! I should have gone into a police court instead of *Sacré Coeur*. Now I should be coming home from Nouméa.

NOÉMIE [*in consternation*]. Julie, Julie, you are as violent and excited as ever!

JULIE [*calming down*]. No, no, discipline has had its effect on me. See, now I can control myself; that was the first time for a great many years—at the convent I never forgot myself—my pupils always thought me very calm and sweet—

NOÉMIE. Then you don't blame me for having told Henri you had forgiven him?

JULIE [*dryly*]. The idea! Haven't I even forgiven myself? Doesn't my presence here prove that?

NOÉMIE. Your coming back is troubling me a great deal—we are on very intimate terms with Jeanne, you know. She comes here almost every day, especially since Henri died. She lives very modestly—alone with her daughter; we are about the only people she sees. Your mother never had the slightest suspicion of the awful secret, so that she is very anxious to have you and Jeanne be great friends. Jeanne is willing—she is simple and utterly incapable of any feeling of resentment. She has always taken an interest in you. Oh, it's not affectation or pretended generosity, take my word for it. Now, of course, she will continue to come as

before, and that's why I am worrying. You are not easy to get along with, Julie; I am afraid her presence here will——

JULIE. I've changed a lot—I'm much simpler now. Teaching little girls for so many years gives one a clearer vision; it simplifies the soul. In any event, the idea of seeing Jeanne again—of course, I can't say that I feel absolutely sure of myself, but I can promise to keep up an appearance of perfect calm.

NOÉMIE [*kissing her*]. Good! I was terribly afraid. She'll be here soon, now—this is the time she usually comes, and to-day of all days she'll not be late. Just think, she's very nervous about meeting you, and she so wants to! Your long penance, which must have changed you so much, has made her quite enthusiastic. To tell you the truth, I suspect that your love for her husband, your terrible passion of which she was the victim, rather throws you into a romantic light in her eyes, though she is extremely pious.

JULIE. Sounds rather foolish!

NOÉMIE. She's not that, you know. When you pushed her into the ravine there was every appearance of an accident—you had foreseen everything.

Why, even I thought it was accidental, the way you screamed—well, she didn't hesitate a second—she understood everything: your love, your jealousy, your—crime.

JULIE. Exactly: was it her heart or her brain?

NOÉMIE [*severely*]. The heart—it must have been, for it drew you to her bedside when she was to give birth to her child. The doctors told her she had no chance to live. Yes, the heart—and the brain, because you left her, with admiration and repentance in your heart—two sentiments that were rather foreign to you. Does that call up to your mind a foolish woman?

JULIE. Oh, don't pick my sentences apart like that. I've lost the art of choosing and weighing each word. You forget that I am used to talking to children from morning till night. We call a pupil "a little fool," when often enough she is very bright. For a few days please don't attach too much importance to the way I express myself. So she's coming?

NOÉMIE. I'm surprised she's not here yet.

JULIE. She's not a member, like mamma, of the "Enfants de Marie"?

NOÉMIE. She's not been long in mourning, you

know. She does not go to the regular meetings as a rule, but to-day Monseigneur is to speak. In a little town that is really quite an occasion—every one is dressed up—a woman who has lost her husband only three months ago—no, it would not be right.

JULIE. That's so, I had forgotten the customs. Aunt, you'll leave us alone together, won't you?

NOÉMIE. Alone? You will talk about the past, won't you?

JULIE. Yes.

NOÉMIE [*nervously*]. Wouldn't it be better to come to it little by little?

JULIE. No, I like things open and above-board. If I am to see her every day I prefer to go to the root of the matter at once. Otherwise, we should both be playing a game. We'll be calm and commonplace enough about it.

NOÉMIE. Julie, in my opinion, you are in a highly nervous and excited condition. I've often noticed that in life matters will take care of themselves when they are let go. Leave it to Providence, that's what I say.

JULIE. Thy will be done! I bow, only I can't exist and go on dissimulating. Humble myself, tear my hair, acknowledge my sin—I'm

willing to do that: I've been a nun, but in the convent I was not taught to look into the eyes of a person who was separated from me by an awful secret. The sisters are not perfect—oh, no: we had our petty quarrels, our hurt pride, and all that childishness—but this is not that sort of case. I'm going to talk with Jeanne.

NOÉMIE. As you like; I'll take Christine with me for a walk in the garden.

JULIE. Christine! That letter she wrote me after her father's death—I have it on my heart. I'll be glad to see her.

NOÉMIE. You'll not be disappointed. She's so sweet and gentle, though they do say she was spoiled when she was a child. She was so delicate!

JULIE. Then she, too——

NOÉMIE. Born two months too early—they had a terrible time saving her, but *that's* all over with: the consequences were not serious for her; for there's not a prettier or healthier girl in France. *You* only, you are the one who suffers. Here they are!

[Enter JEANNE, followed by CHRISTINE. *They are in deep mourning. JULIE goes to JEANNE and kisses her; the two women stand a moment hand in hand, stirred by deep emotions.*

JEANNE *can with difficulty restrain her tears.*
She turns to CHRISTINE.]

JEANNE. My dear Julie, here is my daughter. She's eighteen—quite a young lady.

JULIE [*kissing CHRISTINE*]. How many young ladies I've taught in my day! I hope this one will take the place of all those who have been my friends, and whom the world has taken from me—all, one after the other.

JEANNE [*smiling*]. I am very much afraid that some young unknown will take her from you before very long.

JULIE. That is true—renunciation! We all come to it sooner or later. A big word, isn't it, Christine, to which you haven't given much thought? [*CHRISTINE raises her eyes to JULIE and does not answer.*]

JEANNE. You frighten her.

JULIE. She'll get over it.

NOÉMIE. I frighten no one; therefore I suggest taking Christine for a walk in the garden. I'll bring her back in ten minutes, afraid of nothing.

[*NOÉMIE and CHRISTINE go out.*]

JULIE. It's been a whole lifetime, Jeanne, since we've seen each other.

JEANNE. Yes, life is over for me—I have only my girl——

JULIE. And what is there left for me? A wounded conscience.

JEANNE. Which must be cured at all costs, dear Julie. One second of madness is more than atoned for by years of penance—for I know you were not by nature intended for a nun, not at all. You have done a noble deed. I should never have been able to persevere so in spite of my natural feeling.

JULIE [*smiling*]. But I am no longer persevering.

JEANNE [*in an undertone*]. I guess why: if Henri had lived you would have remained there—— [*She bursts into tears.*] I have no courage when I speak of him.

JULIE. I understand it all. I sympathize with you.

JEANNE [*pressing JULIE's hand*]. How good you are!

JULIE [*coldly*]. Goodness has nothing to do with it.

JEANNE. You mean experience; but I have my own opinion. [*She wipes her eyes*].

JULIE [*after a pause*]. I am very happy to feel that you know why I came back. Yes, I dare re-enter the world because Henri is no longer in it.

You have been so good that I lost even the right to think of him. Thanks to you, I was able to say good-bye to him without being driven away as a criminal, but that farewell could not but be final. Here I am not asking for one bit of his past, not a remembrance. If you wish it, I am willing to promise not to visit his grave. He was yours and yours shall he always remain. I have given myself up to God, and I shall not leave Him. I know it pains you to have me speak of these things, yet I simply must.

JEANNE [*crying*]. I'm crying, but I love to hear anything that reminds me of him. I like to talk about him, because with Christine I avoid the subject as much as possible; she is still so nervously wrought up.

JULIE. It is consoling to talk of those who are gone. I, too, am very glad to hear you speak of Henri. That shows you how utterly detached from the past I am.

JEANNE. I knew you were good.

JULIE. Were you happy?

JEANNE. Very happy. At least, for a long time. Then just the slightest cloud. I feel he is with me still. Every moment when I look up I seem to

see him standing before my eyes. When I open the door to his office I look at once to his chair. I will surely see him there! And I shouldn't be afraid at all! I think that a miracle may happen at any moment. Sometimes at night I wake up with a start, thinking I hear a knock on the door——

JULIE. Imagination!

JEANNE. Who knows? You must at least admit that souls live in close relation with each other, in this life and in the next—I believe that firmly.

JULIE. I believe that the dead do take some interest in us—we who think of them. So, then, there was no trouble, no friction, in your married life?

JEANNE. Practically none; or—yes, just a little. What do you think caused it? You! Strange, isn't it, that I should be telling it to you, but am I not giving you the greatest proof that I hold you far above human passions and weaknesses? I think of you now as a woman who never knew Henri.

JULIE. That's right. Now, please tell me; all those years in the convent have humbled my spirit.

JEANNE. You can imagine that at one time the vision of you came between Henri and me: it was about the time of Christine's First Communion—

my husband did not seem natural—he was thinking of you, I am positive.

JULIE [*incredulously*]. I have no belief in resuscitated affection.

JEANNE. Neither have I, because the truest affection can never die out. You may know how troubled I was: Henri grew more and more distant every day, then all at once I suspected he was still thinking of you, but I was not absolutely sure, because I knew he bitterly regretted having no son: since my—accident—I could not hope for—another child—

JULIE. Thanks to me!

JEANNE. But that is all over and forgotten. Just see how I speak of it!

JULIE. But can I forget when I see the consequences?

JEANNE. Don't let it prey on your mind. If there were consequences you have helped me to forget them.

JULIE. Yes?

JEANNE. So I ended by having an explanation with Henri. I told him that something subconscious, undefinable, yet real to me was giving me great pain, and that I thought it was because

he had no son. He was very gentle and said that I was not responsible for an accident—that that my slip into the ravine when I was walking with you and the premature birth of the little one had resulted in my being unable to bear any more children. That made no difference in his attitude toward me. Then I heard him add with a sigh, “You ought to be very happy. If there is any punishment from Heaven, may it fall on me alone!” I knew what he meant and I saw clearly that you were standing between us, and at once I decided to tell him everything. Was I not right? I had forgiven you the moment—that happened, but had I the right to sacrifice my dignity as a wife—afterward? No, I had not, had I?

JULIE [*coldly*]. No, I do not blame you in the least. What did Henri say?

JEANNE. Nothing—he was deeply agitated for some days, then I felt that he was mine alone, and my trouble left me.

JULIE [*very pale and distant*]. I am pleased that our accounts are even!

JEANNE. Now I am glad I was so sincere with you—this is my reward. This confession might well have raised a barrier in a stronger breast than

yours, but see—it has only brought us closer together. Cousin Noémie has told you, has she not, how she makes fun of me at times because I admire you so immensely? But I do admire you!

JULIE. That is very wrong of you, Jeanne: I don't deserve it. I have had a hard struggle for a great many years, but I have not accomplished much. I have not renounced much. Since you are so frank, I'll be frank in my turn. I see you are ready to accept me as a friend, almost a sister. You were about to propose to me, unless I am mistaken, a friendship, one of those precious friendships founded on mutual esteem and absolute confidence. Well, that is out of the question. No matter what you may think of my character, look facts in the face and acknowledge that I am not easily adapted, that I cannot be bent and moulded—I'm a recluse—I am used to seeking within what others seek from without. I'm dried up—it's incurable. You will see a good deal of me; we may be daily companions; but there is a line which we must draw.

JEANNE [*miserably*]. Oh, Julie, you are very cruel. Have I deserved this? So you say at once that we may be daily companions, but you will not allow us to be real friends for even an hour. I am

terribly sorry—of course, I can't force myself upon you. I should have been very proud to call you sister. I thought it a duty to make this offer which you now refuse. The man who was the cause of your life's tragedy was my own, and it seems only just that his wife should heal the wounds he inflicted. Who better than you, Julie, can understand my feelings? I tried to be worthy of him by trying with all my power to resemble you a little.

JULIE. Jeanne, you make me ashamed of myself, but remember, it is my duty to live the life of a nun out here in the world as well as I can. My existence has to be one apart. I do understand what nobility of soul was required of you to make your offer—I only wish I were big enough to accept it. There, that is the extent of my splendid character which you so admire, and that I find it so hard to live up to.

JEANNE. At least—if you refuse me as a bosom friend you will not do the same with my daughter? At the convent you were adored by your pupils. You will be good to Christine, won't you?

JULIE. Do you ask me that? Me, who tried to prevent her being born?

JEANNE. Why do you harp on that hideous

memory of the past? Yes, I ask you—— Christine has been pressing me with all sorts of questions about you. She has heard one or two pupils from *Sacré Coeur*, girls who come here every fall, talk so enthusiastically about you. You know, Christine insisted on being the first to tell you of her father's death. She begged me to leave it to her—I couldn't understand why. She is ready to love you tenderly, if you don't repulse her. Her affection and sweetness will, I know, be well worth cultivating.

Enter NOÉMIE and CHRISTINE.

NOÉMIE. It's charming outside. [*To JULIE.*] If you hadn't just been travelling I should suggest your coming out with us.

JULIE. Thank you, Aunt, I'm rather tired. Two hundred kilometers this morning is enough exertion for a person who hasn't been beyond a visitors' room for twenty years.

JEANNE. We'll let her rest. Noémie, will you walk home with me? It's so sad going into the house alone. [*She looks uncertainly at JULIE.*] May this young lady keep you company for a little while? As soon as you are tired of her, Barbe can see her home. Can't she, Noémie?

NOÉMIE. Yes, indeed.

JULIE. Then I'll keep her.

JEANNE [*shaking hands with JULIE*]. Good-bye, Julie.

JULIE. Good-bye.

[NOÉMIE and JEANNE go out.]

JULIE [*going to CHRISTINE, taking the girl's face and turning it to the light, she gazes at her, a prey to deep emotion*]. How much she looks like her father!

CHRISTINE. Did you know him well, Cousin?

JULIE. Very well, yes. He was a childhood friend.

CHRISTINE. So Mamma said. We often speak of you.

JULIE. Bad things.

CHRISTINE. Oh, Cousin!

JULIE. Good, then?

CHRISTINE. Of course, Cousin.

JULIE. Did your father ever speak of me?

CHRISTINE [*embarrassed*]. I don't remember very clearly—I think not.

JULIE. Then he didn't listen when your mother said nice things about me?

CHRISTINE. Since Papa died, Mamma has been telling me, in the evenings, about his youth; how she met Papa, when he was living in Paris—— And

one after the other, she told me about all their friends—you especially—a clever woman, so intelligent and so brave! If you had only heard!

JULIE. Oh, dear! But tell me one thing: if you have begun to talk about me in that flattering way only since your father's death, how did the idea occur to you to write me such a sweet letter?

CHRISTINE [*troubled*]. You were a relative, and you had a right to know. Mamma was too broken up. I had to think about all those things——

JULIE [*looking fixedly at her*]. Are you positive she was so broken up that she forgot me?

CHRISTINE [*blushing and turning her head away*]. Perhaps not, but——

JULIE [*taking her hand*]. My child, there must have been another reason for your sending the letter. People don't write the way you did to strangers. There were words there that came straight from the heart. I was deeply moved, and yet you scarcely knew my name.

CHRISTINE [*regaining her self-control*]. Oh, I knew it very well: Mademoiselle Dupré, who was three years in your class, was always talking about you. She never tired.

JULIE. Mademoiselle Dupré!

CHRISTINE. Granddaughter of Monsieur Dupré, the retired Inspector of Woods and Forests. Every year she comes to visit her grandfather; we see a great deal of her, and she says there is no one at *Sacré Coeur* who can compare with you.

JULIE. Unfortunately, I have just proved how far above me the sisters of *Sacré Coeur* are. Beware of popularity! But I am very happy to hear what a good opinion Mademoiselle Dupré has of her old teacher—— Well, at least you did know my name, Christine. I, too, thought a good deal about you—away off there, I inquired about your health; they used to say you were very delicate. You don't look it now.

CHRISTINE. I was—extremely delicate. When I was a baby they thought I was not going to live——

JULIE. Convulsions?

CHRISTINE. No: an accident. The nurse dropped me.

JULIE. Ah! They wrote me, too, that you were very good and worked hard.

CHRISTINE. Who wrote that? Cousin Noémie?

JULIE. Oh, aren't we inquisitive? Of course, your studies would interest a school teacher. Your mother taught you, didn't she?

CHRISTINE. Yes, she was the only one, except my piano lessons. The organist at Saint-Martin taught me.

JULIE. Do you like music?

CHRISTINE. I love it.

JULIE. Good, we'll play duets. Now that you're grown up, your mother probably doesn't teach you any more, does she? How do you spend your time?

CHRISTINE. Oh, I never have any time on my hands. I draw, then there's my music—catechism of perseverance, you see? A little embroidering, clothes for the poor, and I keep the household accounts. Then there's the charity work, the "Home"—I'm secretary of the "Young People's Economic"—

JULIE. So you have no time to spare?

CHRISTINE. Never, especially as—it's funny—since I'm grown up—I used to find the days so long! Now time simply flies.

JULIE. Even when you have nothing to do?

CHRISTINE [*laughing*]. Even then.

JULIE. I don't think that's very hard to explain, dear.

CHRISTINE [*laughing nervously*]. Really?

JULIE. When you have nothing to do, you dream,

and that is your best occupation. You are blushing, child! Of course, I don't want to pry into your secrets— Let's talk about something else.

CHRISTINE. Claire Dupré told me that when any one was talking with you you had a way of making her tell you everything, without trying—she thinks you're something of a sorceress. Now I know you are. Yes, I have a great secret, Cousin; Mamma knows it, but she's the only one. You'll know it, too. I want you to be Mamma's dearest friend.

JULIE. I accept with all my heart. And I'm terribly flattered by your confidence, which I've done nothing to deserve.

CHRISTINE [*smiling*]. I have a great favor to ask of Papa's childhood friend: here's the secret, then—but don't breathe a word of it to Cousin Noémie.

JULIE. Never worry about that.

CHRISTINE. I'm engaged—he is Monsieur Georges Piérrard, son of Judge Piérrard. Oh, of course, you don't know him—he's only been here fifteen years. Judge Piérrard lives in one of our houses. We know him because—well, he's a tenant. Georges always used to play with me here,

just the way you and Papa did [*with a childlike smile*]. I was going to say— There *is* a difference, though: I never wanted to enter *Sacré Coeur*! He's seven years older than I: he's twenty-five. Not so fearfully old, is he, now? All the same he's a Doctor of Science, and an assistant in the Chemistry Department at the Sorbonne. And this is the sad part of it: he lives in Paris and cannot be married before two or three years, when he'll be head of the laboratory. Just now he hardly makes a living, and neither of us has enough to run a home. So I see him only at vacation time. A year ago, during vacation, he asked me to marry him. And do you know, he'll be a member of the Academy of Sciences some day! That's what the head master of the lycée told Papa. He's doing wonderful research work on ethyl—ithol—whatever it is. Mamma saw I was so happy, she didn't see why she should object—yet she said it wasn't reasonable. The Judge, too, says his son isn't quite settled and sure of himself, but he consented all the same. He admires Georges hugely, and why shouldn't he? We haven't told a soul, because we don't know when we can be married—it'll not be for a long time—but that doesn't prevent my being *so* happy! Georges is

here, you will see him. There are eight days more of Easter vacation, then he must go back to Paris——

JULIE [*excitedly*]. Go back to Paris! Carry your affection back there? The hope of a young life! Oh, my child, Paris kills the souls we confide to it. What temptations there are! How much happiness I've seen destroyed in that city, while true and loyal hearts waited in the country——

CHRISTINE. But when you know Georges——

JULIE. I know life. I'll grant that your fiancé is the soul of loyalty, but there are temptations and opportunities there that you have no idea of. What do you know of this young man's life in Paris? Does your mother know?

CHRISTINE. But we know *him*; he grew up here with me. Papa loved him like a son——

JULIE. And he lives in Paris nine months in the year! His future, his relatives, his friends—everything is there. Once a year he makes a pilgrimage here, to smile once again at the scenes of his childhood—what man is so corrupt that he could not do that? It's the comedy of life. One becomes good and honest and pious for a few days when he bathes in the limpid spring of childhood, but with

what feverish haste does he plunge once again into the mire! Really, Christine, it's not surprising with your innocence—but your mother, it seems strange!

CHRISTINE. Mamma sees how I love Georges! She is sure he loves me—that's at least some guarantee of happiness, isn't it?

JULIE. Take my word for it: in Paris there are temptations and there is corruption beyond what you can imagine. Everything that comes from there carries with it the germs of vice. It's accepted as a matter of course that a man should have three or four mistresses at the same time—here one wedded wife is enough for a lifetime. Such monstrous things as that are quite beyond us—! You don't want your happiness ruined, I know; you would despise yourself deep down in your heart. It is better to dry up in a convent, believe me, and I certainly have no special fondness for the life—I am just leaving it—

CHRISTINE. Mamma spent all her youth in Paris; surely it can't be so bad as that! *She* doesn't seem to think as you do!

JULIE. There would be nothing surprising in that—

CHRISTINE. Well, what can I do? I could never think of any one else but Georges for a husband. But of course my conscience must be clear.

JULIE. What can you do? I'll think it over.

CHRISTINE. Please do! Mamma and I and every one here know you're so wise and prudent, and so good! Thank you for helping me! Only please don't wait too long before deciding.

JULIE. I know how impatient you are to know whether he is as good and pure as you are. [*There is a pause, then suddenly JULIE claps CHRISTINE to her breast and asks her with burning intensity.*] Christine, you often came here with your father—in this garden where he and I played together as children, in this house where we conversed together as grown-ups—did he ever say anything to you about his old playmate?

CHRISTINE [*hesitating for a long while*]. I am trying to think.

JULIE [*excitedly*]. No! Never!

Enter NOÉMIE.

NOÉMIE [*dressed in walking attire*]. Christine, you have forgotten all about your piano lesson. I

left your mother trying to read the music of "Les Noces de Jeannette" with Walther, who kept interrupting himself to tell her about his quarrels with the curé of Saint-Martin. Hurry up, now, and run. I've told Barbe, and she is waiting for you.

CHRISTINE [to JULIE]. I forget all about time when I'm with you! [She looks meaningly at JULIE.] Cousin, will you let me come to see you to-morrow? [She offers her forehead to be kissed. JULIE kisses her. To NOÉMIE.] Good-bye, Cousin, I'm going.
[She goes out.]

NOÉMIE [looking after CHRISTINE]. What——? It seems you're great friends already. It didn't take you long to tame her!

JULIE [not hearing NOÉMIE—distracted]. That's the last straw! Do you know, Aunt, what Jeanne has just confessed to me? A nice welcome on my return home! She told everything to her husband, do you hear? And in the most horrible way! Henri blamed his wife because she was unable to give him a son. And she told him that it was my fault. He died knowing that I had put a curse on his family! That's why he didn't speak of me on his deathbed! Mine was a hated, detested name!

At the age of twenty I buried myself alive in order that Henri should at least respect me, and now——

[She goes out hurriedly, leaving NOÉMIE in a state of bewilderment.]

Curtain

ACT II

ACT II

The same scene. JULIE is seated near the window, hands limp, eyes staring into space. She is alone. After a moment NOÉMIE appears.

NOÉMIE [*looks at JULIE, then shakes her head sorrowfully*]. Always depressed?

JULIE. I? No more than usual. I was thinking about a young sister we lost this winter. She was scarcely twenty-three. What a face she had! What large eyes, so full of resignation! She was dying of consumption, and she did not utter a single word of complaint. Her parents lived in the town and saw her sinking day by day. Her mother said, "If she could only be with us for a little while before she died! If I could only have her with me for the last days——! And, who knows? She's choking, maybe, in that infirmary! With plenty of fresh air, perhaps, she might live longer!" It would have been splendid, only a sister belongs to God so long as she lives. Who could ask to have a nun die

outside the convent? But she was our spoiled child and we were sorry for her mother. So we formed a little conspiracy—we wanted to give our friend the happiness of being for the last time at home, and saying good-bye to her childhood. We explained everything to the doctor: he understood, and said that a carriage ride was absolutely necessary for her. The mother superior smiled—she greatly regretted that the convent was so poor that they could not afford to pay for a carriage—a nun taking a ride! But if Madame la comtesse would be good enough to loan her landau—you can imagine how willingly the poor woman loaned it! And then the mother superior continued, with her smile: “Your daughter must not, however, leave the carriage, except in case of accident. It is against the rules. She understands that she is a nun until the moment she leaves the carriage. With that understood, you may drive her about the château—if you open the windows she will see the home where she grew up.”

The mother was very grateful and thanked the mother superior. Then they took the drive. Mother and daughter were together in the carriage. They went to the park, the château—it was terribly hard to have her daughter with her an hour and not give

her even a glass of water in the house where she was born. The mother couldn't stand it. She had told the coachman beforehand to let one of the wheels come off just as he was turning a sharp corner near the château. Then the carriage was to be dragged slowly toward the forbidden door. It was a matter of main force. The mother shrieked, pulled the daughter with her, then she ran indoors. When our little invalid came back that evening she was for the first time worn out and discouraged. Next day she said to me: "The drive wasn't good for me, I shan't go out again. Poor mother! I'm so grateful to her. She thought she was doing me so much good—but nothing of the sort! My return to those who are so attached to life reminds me of the time when I was still uncertain of myself—it's all bad—I had to pray all night in order to have peace the next morning. Here we live on the top of a mountain, from which we spring, as it were, up toward God. I shall stay here till the end comes, with my eyes raised to Heaven. If people do pity me, let them leave me alone. Explain this to my mother—" Aunt, our little friend was right: a nun must not look on the world again after having for so long contemplated Heaven.

NOÉMIE. I can easily see that you are not happy here.

JULIE. You might as well say "unhappy."

NOÉMIE. I see that and I am surprised. Of course, you have nothing to make life very attractive for you, but you really oughtn't to magnify the bad. You've been received everywhere with open arms. When you attended the "Enfants de Marie" it was a real triumph—and then you, the daughter of a president of the society! How proud I am just to be her sister! [JULIE shrugs her shoulders.] Smile once!

JULIE. It's easy to ask.

NOÉMIE. You've been cruelly disappointed: Jeanne didn't keep the secret she promised she would keep, and you therefore jumped to the conclusion that Henri died cursing you, and that thought maddens you. But I tell you, you have no proof of that. Every time I saw him he bitterly reproached himself and said he had forgiven you.

JULIE [*bitterly*]. Doubtless you think Jeanne did precisely the right thing in betraying me?

NOÉMIE. The right thing? Well, she thought it her duty.

JULIE. As you did in preventing the slightest

sign or word of his affection to reach me. It would have been such a consolation!

NOÉMIE. But think, I couldn't write things like that—it's against all the rules there.

JULIE. What is sweet and consoling is never allowed me.

NOÉMIE. You are unjust, Julie; you'll admit that later on.

JULIE. My burden in life is unjust.

NOÉMIE. It's natural for you to be sad, but try to control yourself a little better.

JULIE. Thanks for the advice. At every step I encounter the man who is dead. He rises before me, begging or threatening, all day long, and you say, "Control yourself!" I'm a prey to memories and impressions I thought dead years ago. [*Going to the window.*] This garden, for instance—there is not a corner, not a tree, not a lilac-bloom that doesn't evoke some memory. There is where he spoke so tenderly to me before he went away to Paris. And there he walked past some months later bringing Jeanne, on his honeymoon. Ah, that humble smile on his face when he introduced her to me! That was there—near the hencoop—look! You can see it now. He's everywhere, and I am nearly mad.

And in his house—I can't stand it! Why, I, a nun, with a pure mind, I who shrink in agony from some thoughts—oh, when Jeanne took me into the room where he died, while I was praying by the bed, I heard *their* kisses, floating in the air, mingled with his last breath. Oh, what ridiculous agonizing scenes have occurred! Once when Jeanne and I were going through the house, conversing together in whispers, we came to the spot where I pressed his hand for the last time I ever saw him. My eyes were fixed on a certain point in the corner of the room—I saw him—*there!* Jeanne saw the look on my face, and instead of being shocked she burst into tears and said, “You are like me; I cannot get over it!” What has that woman in her veins? I could have strangled her!

NOÉMIE. How could she be jealous? Can she imagine that after eighteen years you are still able to feel the sting of your betrayed love in all its intensity?

JULIE. Oh, you don't *want* to understand, any of you! At the convent our emotions are shut up with our bodies, and when we return, after spending years there, those pent-up emotions come back to us with the same fury. Don't prisoners return from

jail after fifty years wearing the same clothes they did when they committed the crime? You, out here, disperse, use up your affections; ours eat inward and torture us. What you forget we enlarge upon—you smile over your former sorrows, we eat our hearts out.

NOÉMIE. Why did you come back? It was foolish.

JULIE. How do I know? I was disciplined—my imagination was held in check: I had to give account of every thought—I thought I was cured, that the past was dead. I flattered myself by thinking I had at last, and at what a price! achieved forgetfulness, that I would never again be troubled. I left, and now you see?

NOÉMIE. But if you went back, dear? Yes, I am speaking to the dear little niece I used to have, to the little girl I loved to press to my breast—it seems only a few days ago. Here you are suffering martyrdom. Only at the convent can you have that numb forgetfulness you are already beginning to regret.

JULIE [*terror-stricken*]. Go back to the convent! With what I think—all my imagination—now that I have let down, I cannot submit to all that again; it makes me dizzy to think of it.

NOÉMIE [*to BARBE, who enters*]. What is it, Barbe?

BARBE. The mail. [*BARBE gives NOÉMIE a number of letters and goes out. NOÉMIE raises her head as if to resume the conversation, JULIE reaches for the letters and asks eagerly.*]

JULIE. Nothing for me? Tell me.

NOÉMIE [*reading the addresses and separating the letters*]. "Madame Renaudin"—for your mother. "Mademoiselle Noémie Dulac"—for me. Ah! "Madame Julie Renaudin"—for you! Another for your mother—for me—and the last: another for you. [*She gives the two letters to JULIE, separating her letters from those of her sister.*]

JULIE [*looking at the envelopes*]. From the mother superior—an excellent woman—takes a great interest in me. She strives for perfection. Yes, I tried hard to bear my cross. What an abyss between us—and this one—[*tearing the letter open*]—from a former pupil. Do you mind if I read it, Aunt?

[*Both women open their letters. NOÉMIE has just finished reading hers when she looks at JULIE, who is reading her letter from the pupil.*]

NOÉMIE. Caught in the act! And you say your pupils are ungrateful! How unjust! You told us only the other day that you slaved for your pupils, that when they just begin to have some affection for you their parents take them away, and they never think of you again. Yet here you are, devouring the letter of one of those pupils. She at least knows you are living.

JULIE. And she doesn't know it by her own effort. I asked her for information, and she answers my request. A very nice letter, I must confess. [*Pause.*] Do you believe, Aunt Noémie, that my evil nature, the one that prompted me to commit a crime, is forever dead?

NOÉMIE. What a question, my dear child!

JULIE. But I imagine it would not be difficult to find an opportunity of doing evil?

NOÉMIE. To whom could you do evil?

JULIE. Oh, no one—but if I simply let myself drift—Jeanne, for instance?

NOÉMIE. Jeanne? How terribly ungrateful!

JULIE. One moment: I doubt that. In what way is she generous to me? What now have I to thank her for? Because she was a coward, because she behaved like a victim and made Henri hate me?

Henri had simply pitied me before that—— I didn't expect her attack—here! Yes, people can take revenge on the dead, for I was buried alive. They can do it without being punished. Such victims return nowadays as they did in olden times—did she never think of that? If I were one of those!

NOÉMIE. This is frightful!

JULIE. To say, perhaps; but easy to do.

NOÉMIE. Julie, you are entirely mistaken: her sorrow over Henri's death is so great that no revenge you could think of could possibly affect her.

JULIE. Don't be too sure—think, her daughter! If I struck Christine, wouldn't Jeanne feel the blow?

NOÉMIE. This is revolting—stop it! I know you are merely stubborn, but there always remains some foundation of fact in your mad ideas, even in the worst.

JULIE. I tell you I am serious about Jeanne. I am not the woman to forgive her. I'll never do it! Take revenge? No, I don't intend to do that, but I warn her, she had better be careful. The next time she tells me something of the sort she did the other day—well, I won't be responsible for what I do. Take that as gospel truth. [*Flourishing the*

letter.] I have a poisoned weapon here—I have only to——

NOÉMIE. That letter?

JULIE. This—or something else. I can always find a means of doing what I want. To try for eighteen years, and then find myself with the same instincts and going in the same direction—that's encouraging!

NOÉMIE. Julie, you terrify me. After what I have heard you say I think I had better look after you——

JULIE. Don't worry. I only wanted to impress on you that she doesn't deserve any great credit for living for years according to the will of God.

NOÉMIE. Your humility, Julie, does not look very much like a virtue. [*Listening.*] Isn't that Christine's voice?

JULIE. Probably: she promised to come.

NOÉMIE. And she does come every day. You are always together. How her eyes glisten when she is with you! You are a religion to her—and you, too—I can see that her friendship is something to you.

JULIE. She would be my one chance for salvation, if I didn't have to divide her affection with her mother.

NOÉMIE. We'll talk of this again. I must bring you around at any cost.

Enter CHRISTINE.

CHRISTINE [*kissing* JULIE and NOÉMIE]. How are you? Cousin Noémie, good morning. Cousin Julie—— [*She takes off her hat and throws it on a chair.*]

NOÉMIE. Didn't your mother bring you?

CHRISTINE. No, it was the maid: Mamma's not feeling well.

NOÉMIE. I'll go and see her shortly.

CHRISTINE. She wants to see you. You may take me at the same time.

NOÉMIE. Good!

[*Enter* MADAME RENAUDIN. *She wears a large straw hat with a green veil. Her dress is a pale violet. She has on an apron. A pair of scissors hangs from her belt by a string. She presses to her bosom a bunch of lilacs. BARBE follows her, carrying flowers of various sorts in a basket.*]

MADAME RENAUDIN. Ah, there's Christine.

CHRISTINE. How are you, Cousin Renaudin?

MADAME RENAUDIN [*to BARBE*]. Barbe, take the flowers to the dining-room. I'll come in a minute. [*BARBE goes out, comes back a moment later without the basket, relieves MADAME RENAUDIN of her lilacs and takes them out.*] Our curé will be charmed. [*She takes off her glasses.*] What bright sunlight! I'm nearly blinded, even with my glasses and veil! I tell you, it's been quite a little work arranging a place for him to rest. How hot I am! There's not a breath of air. [*She wipes her forehead with a handkerchief.*] You're nice ones to allow an old woman to wear herself out like this! [*Sarcastically.*] Lovely in the shade, isn't it?

NOÉMIE. The postman came just as we were going to help you. Here are some letters for you.

MADAME RENAUDIN [*taking the letters and looking at the envelopes*]. From Père Picard—that's his writing. We'll see now whether he's going to preach. [*She tears open the envelope. After reading.*] Yes, he's coming. What splendid news! Go and make the bouquets, now, and I'll give you some lemonade. I'm dying of thirst.

CHRISTINE. We'll come in five minutes, Cousin.

MADAME RENAUDIN. Prefer to gossip with

Julie, don't you, instead of working for the "Holy Sacrement?"

CHRISTINE. Only a minute, Cousin, dear.

MADAME RENAUDIN [*going to the door*]. Come, Noémie, I'll wager we'll be done before they come.

CHRISTINE. Then we don't get our lemonade.

MADAME RENAUDIN [*going out with NOÉMIE*]. You won't, never fear.

CHRISTINE [*going to JULIE*]. At last! I thought they'd never go. Dear Julie—since you want me to call you by your first name—I simply can't do without our long talks. There are things I can't say to any one else. Your experience with girls is so wide that you understood me at once; and what is more, made me understand myself. There is no use arguing about what I feel for Georges, but I have quite decided to do nothing that would be harmful for my soul. It needed your support to bring me to that point. I really think more highly of myself since we've been friends—isn't that a sign I should blindly follow your advice?

JULIE. But you mustn't allow our confidence to interfere with your mother's authority.

CHRISTINE. I love Mamma deeply, but somehow it's not the same. I feel she is looking after

my material welfare, while you—you're interested in my soul, in my salvation. Can I hesitate between the two? If the worst comes to the worst, you'll help me.

JULIE. I hope that will not be necessary.

CHRISTINE. And so do I. Oh, and let me tell you—yesterday I saw Georges just for a second alone—I made him promise to come and see you. He'll probably be here to-day. He didn't seem to want to come, but I made him promise. I must know what you think of him.

JULIE. I shall give you my candid opinion.

CHRISTINE. How can I ever thank you? If—I wonder if what I found yesterday would interest you? It's not so very much, I only want to let you see how much I appreciate all you are doing for me. You know, they've emptied the fountain to clean it, the fountain in front of the house where those red fish are?

JULIE. I remember—we used to feed them bread crumbs when we were children.

CHRISTINE. While the workmen were at lunch I was wandering about, and I happened to notice something sticking out of one of the spouts; it looked like gold. I got on a raft and fished for it. It was

a miniature painted on wood—framed—the face looked like yours so far as I could see. The water, though, had washed most of the paint off.

JULIE. What did you do with it?

CHRISTINE. Here it is. [*She takes from her pocket something wrapped in white paper, and gives it to JULIE.*]

JULIE [*after undoing the package and looking at its contents—coldly*]. This was once a portrait of me.

CHRISTINE. I thought so. Isn't there some writing on the back? [*She takes the picture.*] Here, let me clean off the mud. [*She takes out her handkerchief, moistens a corner of it with her tongue, and rubs the reverse side of the miniature.*] No, it's all rubbed off—wait, isn't that the word "Henri?" Look, there!

JULIE [*affecting great calm*]. "Henri"—yes—Henri Laval, your father. I remember, I gave it to him and wrote some sentiment or other on the back—nothing in particular.

CHRISTINE. How did it happen to fall into the fountain?

JULIE [*softly*]. Perhaps the paint wore off—the colors they sell nowadays are so poor!

CHRISTINE. Oh, don't bother about it. I was

very shocked to see that your picture had been thrown into the water like a dead cat.

JULIE [*smiling*]. Profanation, wasn't it? Have you shown the ruin to your mother?

CHRISTINE. No, she is still so sad; it might only awaken old memories.

JULIE. That was wise. May I keep it?

CHRISTINE. Not much of a present.

JULIE. It has its value. [*She looks for a long while at the picture.*]

CHRISTINE [*watching her*]. Julie, you're no better than Mamma when it comes to memories of the past.

JULIE [*quickly raising her head*]. I?

CHRISTINE. Of course, I'm very young, but you ought to confide in me, just as I do in you. I see your hands are trembling, and—you're crying. Dear Julie, it was wrong of me to bring that to you.

JULIE. No, no, I thank you for doing it. It was only thoughts of very long ago that made me cry—it's all over now, see?

CHRISTINE. So you went to *Sacré Coeur* because you suffered some great disappointment?

JULIE. The Lord did not give me a vocation: it was only by dint of hard effort that I went and

stayed there. This portrait dates from the same time: that is all.

CHRISTINE. Some one you loved disappointed you?

JULIE. I can't answer.

CHRISTINE. Please believe me: I'm not merely inquisitive. Please let's not have any secrets from each other, Julie. See, I've given you an example.

JULIE. My past is a closed book to everybody. I hardly dare open it to myself.

CHRISTINE [*playfully*]. So you refuse? Oh, please, let's not have our friendship—

JULIE [*brusquely*]. You have given me a proof that deserves a very different sort of reward!

CHRISTINE. What?

JULIE. Not an hour ago I was alone in this room, struggling against certain memories connected with this picture. I was trying to free myself, but I didn't have very great hopes, for this whole town is full of sad visions that peer at me around every street corner. I was thinking that any chance, a stray allusion, perhaps, might so arouse me that I should lose my head and do something I couldn't be held responsible for. I might seize on the first thing I saw and break it—

CHRISTINE. I'm terribly sorry. I was wrong to insist, I know——

JULIE [*darkly*]. Very wrong. [*With a strange smile.*] If I had lost my head then, as I feared I might, you would have been my victim—I should have crushed you!

CHRISTINE [*clinging to JULIE in a tight embrace*]. I'm not afraid of that!

JULIE [*menacingly*]. Because you think I am good—don't cling to that old idea that suffering cleanses the soul! [*Smiling again.*] I was going to give you some bad news, but now I scarcely dare. If I wound you, you will think I am taking revenge!

CHRISTINE. Julie, how can you think that of me? And you talk so strangely!

JULIE [*brutally*]. Christine, the happiness you are looking forward to appears to me in grave danger. If you are not strong enough to hear what I have to say, tell me so. There is, I can tell you, nothing absolutely tragic. Most young ladies "of the world" would only smile at the idea. But from what I know of you, you are too noble-minded, too proud, to suffer a certain kind of shame, and I feel you are now approaching your Calvary.

CHRISTINE. What is it?

JULIE. I have taken it upon myself to do what your mother has neglected to do: get information about your fiancé. A former pupil of mine, Louise Darcier, is the daughter of a professor in the Collège de France. She therefore moves in university circles. I wrote her; she is the best-informed person on the subject. She is acquainted with Monsieur Georges Piérrard and knows all about his life in Paris. Here is her answer: [*Reading.*] "I see Monsieur Georges Piérrard often at my father's home. Monsieur Piérrard is a charming man; he has a future. The woman who marries him ought certainly to be happy. But you insist on knowing about his private life. You say that your cousin belongs to a very pious family, with strict principles. Well, Madame, Monsieur Piérrard certainly 'amuses himself' here; every young man of his sort, in Paris, or in the provinces, I imagine, does the same. These things are not considered in so serious a light out in the world as they are at *Sacré Coeur*. What would become of us if they were? If a young girl finds her fiancé intelligent, energetic, and well educated, she should consider herself very fortunate. She supplies the rest. In these days it would be childish to ask for more."—And that from an honorable

woman! My dear child, this letter contains precious information—even if it is disheartening. But I'll finish. You will hear some fearful things, that will make you blush for mankind, and wonder how it can stray so far from God! [*She resumes her reading.*] “Just now I do not believe that Monsieur Piérrard has what may be called an ‘*affaire*.’ He is not talked about, and a young man who is not talked about is good. A few years ago his comrades used to joke with him about his fidelity to a certain actress at the Odéon. But I am told on good authority that that affair is over. In short, he is a serious, highly esteemed, very well-behaved young man, of whom I am very happy to have no evil to report.” Consecrate your life to making mothers for the race, and turn out a doll like that!

CHRISTINE [*very pale*]. I know what you would do in my place. If I only dared to—— You can do me a great service.

JULIE. Anything you like, dear.

CHRISTINE. Speak to him for me. I am brave, but if he began to implore me, I think I'd forget myself. Please be careful at first; don't appear to believe. Let him have every chance to defend himself. Just because people *do* talk so much scandal,

he should be considered innocent until he is proved guilty. Tell Georges that certain stories are told about him—ask him whether there's any foundation? Then, if he doesn't deny—

JULIE. He will confess everything—and laugh about it, too. In his opinion those little escapades don't really count. You have just heard what Madame Darcier thinks; these people have no moral sense.

BARBE *ushers* GEORGES *into the room and goes out.*

GEORGES [*bowing to JULIE*]. My lucky star brings me—Christine asked me to come to see you: her best friend, Madame. Here she is, ready to introduce me— [*He looks at the two women, surprised at their coldness.*] I beg your pardon—Christine, help me—have I made a mistake? Have I not the honor of speaking to Madame Julie Renaudin?

CHRISTINE. Georges, I'm going to leave you with her. Answer her questions truthfully—please!

GEORGES. I'm not in the habit of lying. Furthermore, I have nothing to conceal. Good heavens, how pale you are! What a face! What is the trouble?

CHRISTINE. Don't force me to tell you: Julie

will explain it all. Just remember one thing: in my opinion, which is doubtless very old-fashioned, the husband and the wife should help one another to grow better. That is my idea of a real Christian marriage! I shall marry only a man whom I am sure will better me spiritually.

GEORGES. Splendid. I quite agree with you.

CHRISTINE [*bursting into tears*]. You think it's stupid! And my scruples—the actresses at the Odéon have made you think them——!

GEORGES [*looking fixedly at JULIE*]. My dear Christine! I see the reason now, why——

CHRISTINE [*sobbing in JULIE'S arms*]. You see! It's true! You've deceived me!

GEORGES. Did I ever pose as a saint?

CHRISTINE. I can't stand it! Julie, I'm going to your room. Explain to him what I am—he has no idea! [*She goes out.*]

GEORGES. Explain what she is? That's not hard to see: she's crazy.

JULIE. This is no time for joking, Monsieur.

GEORGES. I am in no mood for joking, believe me. I say she is crazy because I believe it.

JULIE. Then craziness is, according to you, be-

lieving that marriage is the union of two beings aspiring to perfection?

GEORGES. How do you make out that I said that? Christine has been made to believe that I am a little weak, as all humanity is weak, and that that is something monstrous. The poor child is very deeply shocked, and believes I am unworthy of her love. That is where I find her illogical. If I were perfect beforehand, then marriage could not improve me. So her object would be defeated at the very beginning. Then I alone could do my duty as a member of that union in making *her* better.

JULIE. Go on! Make fun of her! "Make her better!" She's an angel.

GEORGES. That is where she is to blame. She would do much better to cease being an angel and become a woman. Do you know what Pascal said about that?

JULIE. "He who is an angel is a fool." Pascal would not have said it if he had imagined that it would be used in blaming those who rise above ordinary human cowardice.

GEORGES. Well, in what am I to blame? I must confess I have been told something already, but still I have a right to hear a definite accusation.

JULIE. Is it true that you have had relations with——?

GEORGES. Oh, dear, we're not in a convent. You ask me whether it's true that I have had mistresses? Yes, Madame, several. Christine spoke something about actresses at the Odéon. I was Rose Chalmin's lover. What of it? What the devil——! Even if you have only returned from *Sacré Coeur*, you must have some notion of life—your former pupils write to you—and do you imagine for an instant that there is a single man—unless he's not well—who, when he marries, is all you blame me for not being? I'd be a phenomenon. And keep this in mind: I'm considered a virtuous and straight young man. As a good student, as assistant in the laboratory, with my pupils—I have pupils, and you are speaking with a colleague—I have been much more occupied with my work than with women. They have taken only a few hours of recreation from time to time. Is that anything so tragic?

JULIE. There is no use, Monsieur, wasting our precious time trying to prove that a man who can tell good from evil is a phenomenon. It is clear that you are not one. From the information I have re-

ceived I am left in no doubt. Christine refuses to enter into a union which would be detrimental to her spiritual well-being. No matter how deeply grieved she may be, she would never hesitate before her duty—she asked me to say that to you.

GEORGES. So it's all over? But I shan't take your word for it. Let Christine tell me in the presence of her mother, and then I shall leave. I shan't be very happy over it, because I love her deeply. I shan't even say that I never loved any one but her, but I can say that I have never loved a woman as I do Christine. I don't know a finer character nor a purer heart. You know that very well—you who are trying to separate us—I don't know why. I know you haven't appealed to her pride or her selfishness, or made her jealous—you must have persuaded her that I was a bad influence for her soul. Her mistake is touching: she runs from me as people run from some horrible plague.

JULIE [*sarcastically*]. Precisely.

GEORGES. How you despise me! You don't think I'm as simple as all that! Do I try to defend myself, or tell you that I believe Christine has a thousand chances of finding a less devoted, a less serious husband than I? At bottom you agree with

me: you have decided to dry up the soul of that girl. Why? I think I begin to understand: it looks as if the blossoming of her young heart makes you writhe with envy and jealousy. You want to make her a partner in your own disillusion. When you are through with her and have bent her character to suit you, you will find in her a companion with whom you can mock at those who are happy in their love. It looks, too, as if you were taking revenge on Christine—I wonder why?

JULIE [*agitatedly, interrupting him with affected calm*]. I am waiting until you stop insulting my affection for Christine. You are utterly incapable of understanding the agonies which a pure girl must undergo; you credit me with a power over her which I might use if there were any need; but there is none. Christine is the one who wishes to break off the engagement—I have intervened only to spare her a painful scene.

GEORGES. I'll see her mother. I'm wasting my time here.

JULIE. See Madame Laval; it is your right. I am sure of Christine.

GEORGES. Sure that she will take your advice rather than her mother's? Splendid, indeed! My

ally is a woman of the home, who has loved her husband and been loved by him, who is now loved by every one. *She is the best to consult on a family matter. The woman I am now struggling with was never able to give herself up wholly to God nor to man—she is a wanderer between Heaven and earth, she is trying to take from others the peace she was never able to attain for herself! [He stops short, fearing he has gone too far; then he quickly goes out.]*

JULIE. So I am that! [*She hides her face in her hands, sobbing. A few moments later, enter CHRISTINE, unseen by JULIE. She appears to understand what is troubling JULIE; then runs and embraces her.*]

CHRISTINE. It's over, then? I'm all alone—alone, like you? I saw him leave when I was in your room. He crossed the garden, he was talking to himself and gesticulating like a madman. I was going to call him back, he made me feel so sorry for him! Oh, I know, if I'd been left alone with him, I should never have had the courage to hold out, and you—what it must have cost you! But now—here, you're beginning to cry again! Dear, don't worry about me.

JULIE. We can always find good reason for tormenting ourselves in this miserable life.

CHRISTINE. Did you find out something else? Something worse?

JULIE. Nothing that concerns you. I feel sensations of things that happened long ago. Please don't ask me! Monsieur Piérrard is going to speak to your mother: he will leave the matter in her hands.

CHRISTINE. But Mamma will let me decide. I am not bothering about that—I am afraid of only one thing: she will probably feel hurt that I have decided to take so important a step without consulting her. Poor Mamma! But I've always tried to spare her in that way. So Georges really was—*that?* Did he say he was sorry or anything?

JULIE. He expressed absolutely no regret at what he had done; only, I must say, at losing you. He blamed me severely for inducing you to take so serious a step.

CHRISTINE [*taking JULIE's hand*]. Dear Julie!

JULIE. His unhappiness was driving him to despair.

CHRISTINE. How could he blame you? Aren't my reasons plain enough?

JULIE. My child, they are, for those of us who have faith.

Enter NOÉMIE with her hat on.

NOÉMIE. What are you thinking of? To leave us alone to make the bouquets for the "Fête-Dieu!" Mamma is very angry.

CHRISTINE. I'll run.

NOÉMIE. It's high time. Here I am ready to take you to your mother's; I can't later on. If you want me to take you, make up your mind at once.

CHRISTINE. Wait just a second: I can't go without saying good-bye to Cousin Renaudin.

NOÉMIE. Come back quickly. [CHRISTINE goes out.] What's happening? She's been crying, and your eyes, too——

JULIE. I wasn't tactful. It was only a trifle; I must have said something I shouldn't have. The idea that I was not quite happy disturbed her, dear child.

NOÉMIE. She has a sweet disposition. But, really, when you are with her you ought to be very careful. You mustn't allow your intimacy to have a bad effect on the child; it will, if she once finds out about your trouble. She oughtn't to know such things at her age. Then, there are a great many family reasons.

Enter MADAME RENAUDIN, shaking her finger at JULIE. She is followed by CHRISTINE.

MADAME RENAUDIN. I'll tell Monsieur le curé that your coming back has deprived the procession of one worker.

CHRISTINE [*with meaning*]. The good Lord won't feel the loss!

NOÉMIE [*laughing*]. He wouldn't make a very brilliant affair of you at your age!

CHRISTINE [*mysteriously*]. Don't be too sure! [*She kisses MADAME RENAUDIN, then she and JULIE kiss and embrace in silence.*]

MADAME RENAUDIN [*to CHRISTINE, who is leaving*]. Tell your mother I shall come to see her to-morrow.

[NOÉMIE and CHRISTINE go out.]

MADAME RENAUDIN [*looking after CHRISTINE and NOÉMIE*]. That child doesn't look well—hasn't for the last few days—you oughtn't to talk so much to her. With her disposition, she oughtn't to have too many new ideas. I don't like to see you eternally with her—that's why I scolded about the bouquets. If you'd only played shuttlecock on the lawn, I'd not object, but when you have these long

conferences, well, I'm sorry she didn't spend her time just now with the flowers instead of getting all excited with you.

JULIE. Oh, excited!

MADAME RENAUDIN. Yes, excited. You don't notice it. She seems very quiet—yes. But she's a very excitable little child. Didn't you hear what she said? "The good Lord won't feel the loss," and "Don't be too sure?" You'd be only too glad to have her take your place at the convent.

JULIE. Well, what if she did?

MADAME RENAUDIN. You found it just the thing for you, didn't you?

JULIE. I had no vocation. A great many others have, though.

MADAME RENAUDIN. But think of her mother left all alone! It would be a terrible pity. She simply can't stand being alone: it would be the end of her.

JULIE [*rising, with flashing eyes—in an undertone*]. What a splendid idea!

Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

The same scene. JULIE is discovered alone, knitting.

JEANNE enters a moment later.

JEANNE. How are you, Julie? Oh, you're alone!

JULIE. I'm looking after the house. My mother and sister have gone to the farm, "Belle Fontaine," to see about some repair work.

JEANNE. Good—we shan't be interrupted, then.

JULIE. Where is Christine?

JEANNE. In the garden. I told her to wait for us a moment. She is the one——

JULIE. Very well. Monsieur Piérrard saw you——

JEANNE. Yesterday. Well, I must confess, my heart wasn't set on that marriage. There was no money in it—on either side. I suppose, though, that Georges has a future before him! But promotion

comes so slowly! Yes, I did have some hopes of him. And now the engagement is broken, I see how much I counted on having him for a son-in-law! And he loves Christine so, poor boy! I felt so sorry I couldn't give him the least hope! Yet, even if my intentions were good, it is quite out of the question: Christine is so sure of herself. This has all happened so suddenly, and the reasons she gives are so insufficient, especially as she's so serious and well balanced. She's not at all impulsive. I can't imagine what's the matter with her. There are times when I think she wants to—to become a nun. Then I'm almost crazed with the thought. It often happens that way with young girls who are religiously inclined. Christine is sulky and thoughtful, and sometimes looks so terrified! If she had her way she'd never leave the church where she goes to pray now. A few words she let fall, and these symptoms, are worrying me. I feel that something terrible is going to happen.

JULIE. What do you mean by that?

JEANNE. Has she said anything to you about wanting to become a nun?

JULIE [*with a bitter smile*]. Is that the something terrible?

JEANNE. My only child! She's the only thing that remains of my happiness.

JULIE. No, she said nothing in particular.

JEANNE. Do you think it possible, though——?

JULIE. Even probable.

JEANNE [*clasping her hands*]. Oh, Julie, give her back to me!

JULIE. What can I do? It rests between Christine and God.

JEANNE. But you are between *them*.

JULIE. Evidently you accept Piérrard's version?

JEANNE. Listen to me, Julie: I haven't come to blame you, I am speaking as a friend. We both have Christine's good at heart. I am rather surprised that with all your experience as a teacher you haven't noticed what a tremendous influence you have on Christine in everything she does. It's almost a monomania with her, doing everything you want her to do. She never decides anything without wondering "What would Julie think of it?" As a matter of fact, you have not been a good influence on her. I am sure Christine is wrong in thinking that you refuse to forgive the most trifling sins, and that you look down on our humble, struggling lives. She, too, is forever looking on the moral

side of things, always seeking the why and wherefore. She's not satisfied with anything. I've seen her character change from day to day since you have known her. She was so bright and cheerful before. You came, and good-bye to her light-heartedness, her frankness, her confidence in me! You have no idea what we were to each other. Never before in her life did she hide a single thought or action from me, and here she is about to take the gravest step possible: send away the man she was to marry, without even saying a word to me. I can hardly recognize her now; can't you see how pale and thin she is getting? How fresh and delightful she looked a month ago! Now, at eighteen, she looks like one of those girls of twenty-two or -three, worn out and dried up, waiting for a husband. And *I* brought her to you. Wasn't it an act of affection on my part? You and I could not become deeply attached; there was something unforgettable between us; yet I pitied you, you were so alone! Then I thought of giving you my daughter for a friend—a ray of sunshine for you—don't put out that ray! I must have it or I can't live!

JULIE [*dryly*]. Very sorry, but I cannot do anything.

JEANNE. Have pity, Julie! You have so much influence. Don't use it to destroy her happiness and mine.

JULIE. I'm not so sure just where hers lies.

JEANNE. You mean that she has a vocation? If she has, then I have only myself to pity. But you should have heard her only a few weeks ago; how happy she was over her engagement! It was so sweet! I tell you, she never thought of a convent. A vocation doesn't make itself felt in a week's time without some tragedy or a life's happiness ruined. Ordinarily, a sudden wish to leave the world that way is only the result of great admiration for a severe and devout person. There was a time when I, Julie, looked up to you—that way. So you see, it's not without some basis that I feared what I did. You are capable of exciting her almost to madness. Christine is your slave—see where you are sending her—years of despair and unhappiness, shut up in a convent—or, if she stays with us, an empty and barren existence.

JULIE [*ironically*]. My own story!

JEANNE. For that very reason, Julie, you must spare her. You know what a hell is before her; save her!

JULIE [*angrily*]. Granted even that she can be saved, and that I can save her, why do you ask me to do it? You?

JEANNE. Me, whom you have always hated! I can see that! I shall always be the woman who stole Henri from you. How little I dreamed then that I was taking what belonged to some one else! I thought that a man loved only once, and that that love lasted forever. Even if I had been a hateful and dangerous rival, haven't you had your revenge? You nearly succeeded in killing me, then you condemned me to years of agony watching at my daughter's bedside, almost ruined my happiness by making it impossible for me to give Henri a son— isn't that enough? God himself had been with you, but He has drawn tears from my eyes until I could cry no longer. Am I not a widow now? What more can you ask? Take my daughter from me? No, no, no! Remember, Julie, after you pushed me into the ravine, when they brought me dying to my bed, the first thing I did was to ask for you. I then gave birth to the child—they didn't think I'd live. You came, haughty and cold; I felt you were distant, hostile. Did I hesitate for a moment in the midst of my agony to give you my

hand? Yet you tried to take a life that had only begun, and so happily begun! I forgave you with all my heart, for I thought I was going to die. I saw and understood everything: I knew you had hoped to become Henri's wife and I pitied you sincerely. You saw that, and you were deeply moved. Don't deny it. You came because you had to come: you came intending to put an end to me rather than receive my forgiveness—and you said good-bye and made up your mind to a sacrifice which was all the more noble because my probable death would very soon after have given Henri to you. What has happened to you since then? Why do you hate me so? Julie, if you believed in God, how could you have prayed so often with that on your mind?

JULIE. My conscience was clear, and the sacrifice I made in all sincerity. I did not hate you then; your generosity disarmed me.

JEANNE. Well, then?

JULIE. My only consolation, the only thing I had to live for was the idea that Henri thought well of me, kept me as a sweet memory. That was my illusion. That was my one weakness; I could not give it up. I hoped that Henri sometimes at least regretted the woman who was so devoted to

him. I, a nun, did not dare open my eyes—that thought was so dear, so sweet! I brought that dream here with me—I clung to it with all the desperate strength of passion—I came to reap the reward of my long penance. It seemed impossible that Henri had died without confiding a few words to some one, a peace message for his disconsolate friend. I looked for it, sought everywhere for that word which should bind our former existences once more. When I arrived, in place of that hoped-for message, I hear from your lips that you have told everything to Henri. In his eyes, then, I had ceased to exist as a saint and was only a penitent. My poor sacrifice—ha! Did he even pity me for it? You were jealous of me, and you made of me and my sacrifice an object of horror—that is why I hate you with an undying hatred. It was your right, yes, your “dignity as a wife” demanded that you tell him! But the victim does not gratefully kiss the hand of the other! Ha, I went to that prison and spent the best years of my life and found out that I was making a sacrifice for your magnanimity which I now see was only affected, that you were only waiting for a chance when I was out of the way to betray me. And now, try to make me

pity you by appealing to my generosity, make me pity you as a mother!

JEANNE. So this is your revenge?

JULIE. I am not troubling about you, but when Christine asked my advice, I put her on the right track, according to the strict principles of the convent: I apply them to affairs of the world. So much the worse for the world if they cause suffering. Monsieur Piérrard says I am outcast of man and God, that I am a wanderer between Heaven and earth—careful, then, of the menacing cloud! This cloud blasts the springtime! Does a water-spout take revenge? Doesn't God direct it?

JEANNE. Or the devil! He alone could drive you to destroy a child's happiness, a child who has confided in you in order that you might torture the mother, but the mother will defend the child!

JULIE [*ironically*]. We shall see! Here is Christine.

Enter CHRISTINE.

CHRISTINE. I heard you in the garden: you were talking so loud! I tried not to listen, but it made no difference. I know you are discussing my engagement; you look angry, Mamma; but it's not

Julie's fault—really. I've made up my mind; I'm very sorry you're not pleased, but I've told you all my reasons. How can a self-respecting girl marry a man whose ideals and life are not as pure as her own? Don't blame me, I don't deserve it. I'm old enough, and I believe I have sense enough, to know how to behave.

JEANNE. No, dear child, you are not old enough to know the wickedness of human nature, and you don't understand how to deal with it. You've been caught in an awful trap, you are being used in order to torture your mother; you ought to know that.

CHRISTINE. Mamma, I beg you—— You are altogether mistaken. Julie and I have hardly ever mentioned you.

JEANNE. Exactly: my name wasn't mentioned, but my hopes were being wrecked. I brought you up to be the wife of a distinguished man, to be a mother, to surround me with dear grandchildren—I'm getting old, you see—now you have been given an ideal you never before thought of, that you are not able to live up to, that only a very few people can ever hope to realize.

CHRISTINE. You mean you think I am going into

a convent? There again you are mistaken: my first duty is *not* to leave you. I'll always live with you. It would be too cruel to leave you alone. I shall never marry; the danger I have just escaped has taught me a lesson. We'll live on together quietly.

JEANNE. Quietly? You may stay with me in the flesh because you believe it your duty, but your love for me—it went the moment that woman came here.

CHRISTINE. Julie! Oh! Mamma, please——
Both of you—I love you, respect you——

JEANNE. Yes, judge between us, between a woman you've known for scarcely two weeks, and your mother. "Respect!"—just a moment, I——

JULIE. She is right, Christine, you should not compare us. Your mother can hold her head high; I must bow mine in the dust: I have a past. I confess my crime. To compare any one with me is to drag him down and debase him. But I ask you frankly, did I ever try to influence or steal your affection, your confidence? Did I ever say a word about your becoming a nun? We have talked together about your future; I told you I considered marriage something sacred—as a Christian, which

I try hard to be. If people of the world are offended, I can't pity them.

CHRISTINE. That's the absolute truth, Mamma, we've never mentioned names: we talked about generalities—about what a woman ought to expect of her husband. Is that a forbidden subject?

JEANNE. Morality is a subject which some women ought to discuss only with great care.

CHRISTINE. Listen, Mamma, you mustn't blame Julie. You will regret it bitterly. I am ready to take your advice and act on it—I'll obey you—if you ask me not to see her again, I'll do as you say, but not until I tell you why I admire her so immensely. You think it's just the enthusiasm of a young girl? That's not flattering, but I tell you, I'm not as easily influenced as all that. I'm not impulsive in matters of affection, and I have Papa's authority for what I'm going to say. [*To JULIE.*] Papa and you were everything to one another, weren't you?

JULIE [*at high emotional tension*]. Oh, Christine, I don't think I understand. Do you mean that your father ever spoke about me?

CHRISTINE. Yes; I simply had to make friends with you.

JEANNE. Take care, child, don't say anything foolish. Hadn't you better tell me first? There are things you don't understand. Let me decide.

JULIE. No, it's between us two. Pity me, Jeanne, let her! I'll be so grateful.

CHRISTINE. If there were any harm in telling what I know, I should have been told to be silent. But I was left perfectly free. Seeing how things are now, I'm sorry I've not spoken sooner. Near the end of his sickness, when we were told there was no hope of his living, one morning I was watching alone by Papa's bedside; I leaned over the bed, he caught me in his arms and held me with all his strength and said to me: "Christine, I want you to do something for me—don't forget: you know that a cousin of yours, Julie Renaudin, is a nun at *Sacré Coeur de Vannes*—she has suffered because of me, and I profoundly regret it. On my deathbed I think often of her. If ever you think she will be consoled by knowing this, tell her. But make sure first, otherwise it would serve only to summon up painful memories which she has probably not been troubled with. In any event, I want you to make a special effort to be friends with her. This is a sort of reparation for me—be a daughter to her. I

hardly think you will see her before you marry, but afterward, make an effort to do so and be kind to her. I count on you, dear child." Then he pressed me again with a kind of fierce rage, as if he wanted to transfer what was dying in his heart to my own.

[JULIE listens to all this with breathless anxiety, her eyes staring, fists clenched. As CHRISTINE ends, she falls to her knees and buries her face in her hands, her whole body convulsed with sobs. CHRISTINE tries to raise her.]

Julie, why, what's this? You're all——! Look at me; shouldn't I have told you?

JULIE [*still on her knees, her head bowed, hands joined and held humbly out to CHRISTINE*]. Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes! If you had only spoken before! Then I shouldn't have had to fall at your feet, at your mother's, to raise my arms up to Henri and ask forgiveness of you three, forgiveness for my hateful hypocrisy. How detestable I am! Yet—give me one word of pity. Christine, tell me again: your father did not die hating me?

CHRISTINE [*surprised and a little frightened, steps back while JULIE supplicates her*]. Oh, Julie, I told you exactly what occurred at his last conversation

with me. After that he was so weak he could hardly smile at us. He hate you? How horrible! Then what did you think of that letter I wrote you? You said you were touched by it? I wrote that straight from the heart, that was my way of doing what he asked me—the first chance I had. That was before he was buried.

JULIE [*still on her knees*]. I so wanted to hear you say that again. I'm drinking in every word. [*She quickly rises and goes at once to her work-basket, in which she looks for something. She finds the miniature and hands it to CHRISTINE.*] This portrait that I once gave to your father—you must know about it now—at a time when I thought he loved me—*why*, tell me, if he did love me, did he throw it away?

JEANNE [*leans over, sees the portrait and recognizes it*]. Julie, I did that. I was terribly worried and so unhappy. One day I happened to see that; it was in a corner of his desk. I got rid of it—

CHRISTINE [*falling into JEANNE'S arms*]. Mamma! I understand everything now, and I found the picture. You threw it away when you were nervous and distracted, and I found it again. I've called up a painful memory, I've been made to play a part— [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Julie!

JULIE. Your mother is right: you have a great deal to learn about the hypocrisy of mankind; you must be careful.

CHRISTINE. Why should I be careful? I was doing only what my father told me to do: he knew you and sent me to you.

JULIE. He knew me when I was happy: I was engaged to him. He scarcely saw me after his marriage. How could he foresee what a terrible blow that was going to be for me? He gave you into the hands of a desperate woman. I tried to avenge myself on an enemy by destroying your happiness—I took no pity on you. I know how to handle young girls; I took what was best in you and twisted it to my own advantage. Poor child! I made you believe that a pure woman can never accept a man who has loved before. I called it desecration—I said that, didn't I? And now here I am, trying to gather a few tiny fragments of your father's affection. Your father turned from me once and let me wither and grow old alone.

[**CHRISTINE** *buries her face in her mother's bosom.*]

JEANNE. She is not able to hear anything more.

JULIE. Take her away—I think she's saved.

CHRISTINE [*urging her mother out*]. Come, Mamma—— [*A little dryly*.] “Saved?” What did she mean by that?

JULIE. That nothing in your life to come will bear a trace of me. Promise me it won’t, and let my conscience be clear.

CHRISTINE [*distinctly*]. It may, Julie; my life to come will be modelled after Mamma’s. [*She starts to go out before her mother.*]

JEANNE [*with a look of mute resignation in JULIE’S direction, she stops, undecided*]. Christine, kiss her—don’t forget your father’s last wish. Be good to her. [*CHRISTINE returns and kisses JULIE perfunctorily.*]

JULIE. Thank you, Jeanne, I ask no other forgiveness—it would be an insult to a nature like yours. Good-bye—and don’t come back for two or three days.

[*CHRISTINE has already disappeared. Her mother joins her. JULIE nearly faints; she goes to the window, presses her forehead against the glass, and cries bitterly. After a moment enter BARBE. JULIE, surprised, is about to leave, but BARBE goes straight to her.*]

BARBE. I think they're coming back from the country; I hear the carriage. [*Seeing JULIE's face.*] Are you sick, Mademoiselle?

JULIE [*vaguely*]. No—thank you—what? Oh, my mother's coming back?

BARBE [*pulling back the curtains*]. Yes, Mademoiselle. [*Laughing.*] Oh, and see what they've brought! Look at the packages! [*She turns to one side and sees something at the other end of the street which appears to absorb her attention.*] Why, those Laval ladies have met Monsieur Piérrard—they're talking together—there's Mademoiselle Christine—what manners! They say she wants to marry him.

JULIE. They'll make a nice couple.

BARBE [*leaving the window*]. I'll go and help Madame.

[*She goes out. A carriage is heard rattling before the house and stopping. JULIE resumes her knitting and appears to be at work near the window.*]

Enter MADAME RENAUDIN, excitedly, accompanied by NOÉMIE and BARBE. Baskets, poultry, branches, and vegetables, are among the impedimenta. While MADAME RENAUDIN is enumerating her trophies, BARBE

takes out the objects and then leaves the room.]

MADAME RENAUDIN. What a lovely day! You were foolish, Julie, to stay in doing nothing. You might have seen all the improvements on the farm. Why, it's a regular little palace now; I tell you, the farmers are very particular nowadays. They must have things nicely painted and arranged, and then, you should have seen——! There was a calf born yesterday, no bigger than a cat! And see what we've brought! Eggs, butter, fresh cabbages, asparagus, and lilies of the valley. And what do you think? The farmer's wife wanted to build a new creamery, but we put our foot down on that: costs three hundred francs—heavens, there's no end of things——

NOÉMIE [*triumphantly*]. I, too, have something. Guess what? [*She goes to JULIE, extending her joined hands which make a hollow.*] Don't let it go! It's a little warbler—see how pretty!

JULIE. Let's see! [NOÉMIE *carefully takes away one hand and JULIE brutally seizes the bird.*]

NOÉMIE. Don't take it that way: you're hurting it! Give it back!

JULIE [*opening her hand and showing the bird,*

which lies dead]. There! It won't fly again!
[*She throws the bird into the fireplace.*]

NOÉMIE [*angrily*]. You've killed it. How cruel, how cowardly! You like to make things suffer!

MADAME RENAUDIN [*going to JULIE*]. What? Did you kill it? How could you be so brutal?

JULIE. It would be cruel and brutal to put it in a cage, poor little bird! So long as it lived, *that* would be wrong. [*Collecting herself.*] Mamma, Aunt, this is the last time I shall trouble either of you, so don't scold me. I've been thinking all day: freedom doesn't agree with me. I took a little holiday, that was all, and it's beginning to pall on me. I feel I want to see my pupils again—so I have decided——

MADAME RENAUDIN. To go back to *Sacré Coeur*?

JULIE. Yes.

MADAME RENAUDIN [*kissing JULIE and wiping her eyes*]. My child, this is another cross sent to me by the good Lord. But I'm not surprised—just what I said to Noémie—ask her—it must have been ordained that you would tire of this. So we're going to lose you again? But then, we can come to see you—your poor dear father isn't here now to prevent us.

JULIE. You might even live in the convent. They take ladies to lodge there——

MADAME RENAUDIN. Wait—I'll have a look in at the kitchen. Barbe has no sense about getting things ready; I must be there to watch her. I'll be back. *[She goes out.]*

[JULIE sits down again, takes her crochet work, and plies her fingers at a furious speed.]

NOÉMIE *[standing in the middle of the room].* I don't know what to think.

JULIE. I must.

NOÉMIE. I know it: and you are right, Julie. My heart's so full I can hardly keep from crying; but I think you are doing right. I've watched everything very closely, and I have understood. His death, above all—you didn't see him buried—for you he still lives in our midst—— But now, why do you begin again that hell of convent life? If you tried to settle down here in the country, say at "Belle-Fontaine," where we've just been—there's a nice apartment for you?

JULIE. If I wanted only a refuge against memories of Henri, that might be possible.

NOÉMIE. Then there is something else?

JULIE. Yes, you know, Aunt, when I commit a crime I must expiate it in the convent.

NOÉMIE. Oh, I suspected—— What has happened?

JULIE. Nothing that is beyond mending: the evil will disappear with me—don't ask; I belong to the convent to the end of my life. For eighteen years I was a blind instrument in the hands of the superiors. My virtue—I *was* virtuous—was their masterpiece; I breathed, spoke, thought, was at one with the convent community. Now that I can't manage my will, the responsibility is driving me mad.

NOÉMIE [*kissing her*]. Poor Julie, if there were only no life to come!

CURTAIN.



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